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Young people and alcohol – where's the risk? Changing the focus of school based prevention initiatives.

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Young people and alcohol – where's the risk? Changing the focus of school based prevention initiatives.

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Research statistics highlighting the social costs of widespread excessive alcohol consumption have led to a proliferation of school based prevention programmes which aim to give young people the skills and knowledge necessary to resist social pressure to drink alcohol and avoid potentially 'risky' consumption. Such interventions offer, however, limited evidence of long term success (Babor et al 2010). Drawing on a case study of a pilot programme developed by Alcohol Focus Scotland this paper illustrates the promotion of a critical social perspective motivating young people to consider instead the risk posed by the marketing techniques of the alcohol industry. It is argued that a pedagogical approach focusing on developing critical awareness rather than shaping individual behaviour has the potential to reframe our understanding of this type of preventative health education as a form of political literacy or citizenship education.

Key words: alcohol risk, school-based prevention, critical social perspective

Introduction

Alcohol is a legal psychoactive drug with dependence producing properties which results in 3.3 million deaths each year worldwide and is a causal factor in over 200 disease and injury conditions (World Health Organisation 2014). Anderson & Baumberg (2006) reported that the deaths of one in ten young women and one in four young men aged 15 - 29 in Europe were attributable to alcohol. Little wonder that preventing young people engaging in harmful alcohol use is an international public health concern (Griffin and Botvin 2014).

A key feature of prevention initiatives aiming to forestall future alcohol misuse in young people is the desire to address risk (unhealthy) and promote resilience (healthy) factors. School based educational interventions are an internationally popular method most commonly provided in the UK as part of the Personal and Social Education (PSE) curriculum (Botvin and Griffin 2007). Although there is a proliferation of prevention initiatives the efficacy of school based educational programmes continue to be the subject of debate, with few studies able to evidence behavioural change in the long term (Giesbrecht 2007, Foxcroft & Tsertsvadze 2012, Room 2012, Babor et al 2010). This leads some commentators to argue that the focus of alcohol harm prevention should be on political and social policy strategies to reduce consumption in the population as a whole rather than education and persuasion.

In sum, the impact of education and persuasion programmes tends to be small, at best. When positive effects are found, they do not persist and a focus upon educating and persuading the individual drinker to change his or her behaviour without changing the broader environment cannot be relied upon as an effective approach (Babor et al 2010:775)

Taking up this point that the focus of prevention of alcohol harm needs to be the wider social and cultural environment this paper draws on a case study of small pilot programme by Alcohol Focus Scotland to explore a conception of educational prevention which concentrates on raising young people's critical awareness of how and why alcohol plays such a significant role in the cultural life of Scotland (in this case), the ways in which the alcohol industry markets alcohol and the impact on them as young people.

If we see alcohol harm through the lens of critical theory this opens up the opportunity to switch the emphasis of educational intervention from behavioural change to critical awareness. In this account critical theory refers to a theoretical tradition developed by the Frankfurt school but it is not a unitary approach (Kincheloe & McLaren 1994; Giroux 2001). It is based on dialectics - the interactive relationship between the individual and the social – and explores contradictions. Giroux (2001) argues that the dialectical nature of critical theory enables an educational researcher to see schools not just as controlling, instructing or indoctrinating but also promoting pupil empowerment and self-transformation as well as individual and collective change. A key premise of critical theory is that meanings of an observation or an experience are not self-evident but will depend on a struggle over interpretation and definition.

Critical theorists begin with the premise that *men and women are essentially unfree and inhabit a world rife with contradictions and asymmetries of power and privilege* (McLaren 1998:171 emphasis in original)

A central element of a critical perspective in prevention programmes, then, is engaging young people in debate concerning the ideological assumptions and power relationships present in their everyday experiences. It is the contention of this paper that applying this approach to alcohol misuse prevention programmes has the potential to reframe our understanding of preventative health education, shaping it as a key element of political literacy or citizenship education rather than personal social education.

Exploring the context of alcohol harm

Alcohol harm is particularly pertinent to the Scottish situation. It is estimated to cost Scotland 3.6 billion in health, social care, crime, productive capacity and wider costs (Scottish Government 2007.) Young people are recognised to be particularly at risk both from the harm caused by others drinking and the long term implications of engaging in alcohol consumption at an early age (McCambridge et al 2011). Heavy alcohol use at a young age is known to be a risk factor contributing to poorer mental health, cancers in later life, disability, accidental death, unsafe sexual activity and offending behaviour (Hastings and Angus 2009). 68% of young offenders (average age 19) in Scotland reported being drunk at the time of their offence (Scottish Prisoner Survey 2013).

Alcohol has become an intrinsic aspect of cultural life, particularly in the wealthier countries of the world, consumed at weddings, funerals, celebrations, meetings with friends and at home alone. Drinking alcohol including excessive alcohol consumption is so much part of the cultural norm in Scotland that people abstaining from alcohol can be perceived 'odd' (Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2013). Hardly surprising then that alcohol is the most commonly used addictive substance by young people in Scotland with 83% of young people aged 16 – 24 reporting drinking alcohol in 2013 and 42% of those recounting drinking over the recommended limit (Scottish Health Survey 2014).

Huge budgets are invested by the alcohol industry on alcohol marketing (approx. 800 million in UK each year (Institute of Alcohol Marketing 2013)) to 'educate' and persuade people, including young people, to drink particular alcohol products and become loyal to particular brands. Research has demonstrated that the earlier consumers are exposed to brands the more likely they are to be loyal to them throughout their lives making this kind of marketing particularly valuable to the alcohol industry (Ellis et al 2010). These techniques are effective in negatively influencing young people's consumption behaviour as marketing has been shown to speed up the onset of drinking, increase the likelihood of drinking and increase the consumption of those already drinking (Snyder et al 2006, Anderson et al 2009 and 2009). A recent study by a group of UK NGOs found widespread recognition of alcohol brands amongst children as young as 10 (AFS 2014). For example it was found that alcohol sponsorship of football meant that

children associated alcohol brands with their teams demonstrating children's early exposure to alcohol marketing and the implicit normalisation of alcohol consumption.

Babor et al (2010) point out that public health media campaigns highlighting the risks of alcohol cannot compete with alcohol industry marketing budgets, and the consequent quality and cultural prevalence of pro alcohol advertising. It is somewhat ironic to note then that strategies to tackle alcohol harm which primarily focus on educating and persuading individual consumers to change their drinking behaviour are popular with the alcohol industry who for example fund the UK registered charity Drink Aware. Drink Aware's website describes their aim as "*to change the UK's drinking habits for the better*" and to do this by encouraging responsible drinking. They describe one of their values as '*We are committed to understanding consumer behaviour and to the importance of individual responsibility.*' This charity subtly constructs the problem of and solution for alcohol harm as the responsibility of individual consumers. Scientific evidence demonstrates, however, effective strategies to reduce alcohol harm must involve reducing alcohol consumption in the population as a whole which includes increasing price, reducing availability and limiting children and young people's exposure to marketing (Hastings and Angus 2009, Babor et al 2010).

These neoliberal times are characterised by a policy making struggle between the economic interests of increasingly large and powerful global corporations and national governments who are elected to represent wider public interest (Miller and Harkins 2010). This is particularly illustrated by the tactics of the alcohol industry. Alcohol production and sales have like many other commodity manufacturers become a global industry with a few multinational companies dominating the international alcohol market. The size of these companies means that they can allocate considerable resources to protecting their financial interests, creating problems for governments with an interest in protecting public health and reducing the financial burden of alcohol harm. In Scotland this is demonstrated in the Scottish Whisky Association (SWA) mounting a legal challenge to try to prevent the Scottish Government implementing minimum pricing legislation. This legislation was passed unopposed in 2012 however implementation of the law has been effectively delayed by ongoing legal challenges. While SWA's initial legal challenge was defeated a further appeal is currently awaiting a preliminary ruling by the European Court of Justice before a final decision can be made by the Scottish Courts (Scottish Government 2015). In France long standing legislation the Loi Evin (the Evin Law) which strictly controls the advertising of alcohol is currently under attack by a senator representing the interests of the wine industry (Le Monde 11.6.2015).

When we consider addressing the risks of alcohol harm with young people it is clear that educational interventions aiming to influence their drinking behaviour are inadequate in the context of a tsunami of pro-alcohol messages. Weak advertising standards mean that young people, if not directly targeted, are increasingly exposed to alcohol marketing via social media in online spheres not necessarily visible to adults (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, MySpace etc.); via alcohol product placement – key characters (role models) in films and television programmes popular with young people shown consuming branded alcohol products; alcohol sponsorship of sports events (e.g. Magners cider displayed on Celtic football team shirts); or music festivals popular with young people (eg T in the park in Scotland sponsored by Tennants lager); and by the development of sweet alcoholic drinks such as alcopops and 'shooters' (cocktail drinks in shot glasses) where the sweet flavour or drink size masks the high alcohol content (Hastings and Angus 2009).

There a range of studies on education prevention strategies in school which evidence a change in attitudes towards and knowledge about alcohol and which note a difference in young people's self-reported drinking behaviour - most recently for example the CLIMATE schools alcohol module developed in Australia (Vogl et al 2012, Teeson et al 2012). However a large body of evidence would suggest that educating young people about the harms of alcohol is largely ineffective without concomitant social and

political measures to reduce universal population consumption (Babor et al 2010, Giesbrecht 2007, Room 2012). This would seem to suggest that the popularity of alcohol education with young people in school ignores the evidence and is largely pointless. However such a position ignores that education does have a role in promoting social and cultural change. An important element of this is recognising young people as not merely objects of educational intervention but rather active subjects who can work alongside or indeed lead adults in producing knowledge and promoting social change (Fielding 2012, Freire 1972).

Case Study Method

The conceptual framework of this case study is informed by critical theorists researching prevention initiatives in schools such as Piran (2010), Levine (2014) and Giesbrecht (2007). The Alcohol Truth Project case study described here draws on data from: - a review of the work of Alcohol Focus Scotland (AFS); an earlier AFS pre-pilot programme undertaken with pupils in a Midlothian secondary school; and an evaluation of a 10 week pilot programme with pupils in an Edinburgh school which involved: - five session observations; a focus group with pupils during session 2; individual interviews with - the school guidance teacher who supported the initiative, the two facilitators, and 8 of the pupils participating; analysis of session evaluations filled in by pupils at the end of every session and baseline knowledge questionnaires completed at the start and end of the course. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and observation notes written during and immediately after sessions. Data analysis identified key themes which have been examined through the lens of critical theoretical studies on alcohol education prevention strategies with young people, and literature on education for citizenship.

The Alcohol Truth Project

The Alcohol Truth Project is informed by an approach which uses media literacy as a means of engaging young people in a critical social perspective. Unlike many prevention programmes the primary focus is not on modifying the behaviour of young people. The project aims to raise young people's awareness that alcohol is a harmful drug, that marketing on social media influences their attitudes toward alcohol and seeks to encourage them to buy and consume alcohol. It seeks to encourage young people to critically consider the concept of alcohol harm as something which impacts on whole communities as well as individuals and to develop their own views on the impact of alcohol in their lives and the life of their community. In addition the goal is to raise young people's critical awareness of how and why young people are actively targeted by alcohol industry marketing through social media and to consider what action they could take in response.

The Alcohol Truth Project was piloted in an Edinburgh school from January to March with a group of voluntarily participating fourth year pupils aged 15/16 years. An average of 13 pupils participated over the ten week period of the half day course. The programme consists of 10 structured sessions, delivered in this instance by facilitators employed by Alcohol Focus Scotland, which aimed to encourage critical reflection, discussion and exploration of a key theme relevant to the overall aims of the project. While there are central elements in each of the sessions - a key theme or focus, core group and individual activities, fact sheets that can be taken home and discussed with family and tasks that can be reflected or acted on between sessions – there is room to adapt sessions to the young people participating, the setting and the resources available. Following sessions which engage young people in learning about alcohol marketing, participants are encouraged to take a more pro-actively creative role, devising their own social media response that uses their learning to raise the critical awareness of other young people. An outcome of the project for young people participating is the production of a poster or short film illustrating a key message which is then posted on a 'word

press' internet site making their social marketing messages available to other young people and the wider public.

Botvin and Griffin (2007:613) have highlighted key features of effective drug prevention programmes including addressing "multiple risk and protective factors", helping "young people recognise and resist pressures to engage in drug use", providing "accurate information regarding rates of drug use to reduce the perception that it is common and normative" and that programmes "are delivered using interactive methods." I would like to consider some of the key themes identified here in relation to the approach of the Alcohol Truth Project.

Addressing risk and resilience

The need to address multiple risk and resilience or protective factors in relation to alcohol harm and young people is supported by a range of research papers although they represent different loci of concern. As highlighted above some theorists are primarily concerned to address the risk behaviour of adolescents by giving them the individual skills to resist social pressure (Griffin and Botvin 2014, Teeson et al 2012, Vogl et al 2012) whereas others emphasise the importance of also addressing the risks associated with the social and cultural context in which young people are embedded (Levine 2014, Piran 2010, Stigler et al 2011, Giesbrecht 2007).

Levine (2014: 181) for example argues that an understanding of risk and resilience factors must be informed by a developmental contextual approach which 'emphasises the dynamic, changing, malleable and non-reductionist relationships between individuals and the multiple physical and social dimensions of their ecology.' This would include family, school, neighbourhood, religious community, mass media and cultural values. Piran's (2010) research on preventative work in schools in relation to eating disorders has similarly highlighted a multi-level – macro, 'mezzo' and micro - understanding of causality of eating disorders. Macro relates to social structure and position such as class, gender, age, ethnicity; 'mezzo' to neighbourhood or school and micro to the individual. She draws attention to the prevalence of prevention programmes which concentrate on the individual and drawing on a feminist analysis highlights the more urgent need to minimise risk factors at the societal and institutional level.

In the school where the Alcohol Truth Project pilot took place alcohol harm was generally taught as an element of other topics and mainly in Personal, Social Education (PSE) or Religious and Moral Education (Guidance Teacher Interview January 2015). For example alcohol education was taught as an element of a teaching pack called "Keeping Myself Safe." Media literacy was also taught within the context of English and Modern Studies. Pupils had also looked at smoking adverts and gender in relation to the media in PSE. The Guidance teacher pointed out that a key theme in media studies is also "being safe." Pupils also highlighted a session on "staying safe" and sessions giving factual information on alcohol where the focus they felt was on them as young people and their safety. Some had looked at marketing and alcohol in modern studies but had not looked at young people as a target for marketing. They had considered the manufacture of alcohol in Chemistry but again not the social context of alcohol consumption (Focus group session 2 Jan 2015).

The construction of risk in relation to alcohol interventions in school can be seen to relate to addressing young people's "risky" consumption behaviour so that they can "Keep Myself Safe" as the name of the pack implies. In contrast the Alcohol Truth Project reflects the perspectives outlined earlier which locate risk in social practices such as alcohol industry advertising on various social media which encourage children and young people to consume alcohol.

I thought it was going to be about alcohol but it is more about social media and its effects on alcohol advertising – how they market to young people. The alcohol industry spend 800 million on advertising. ...Made me aware of how the alcohol industry targets people (Craig¹)

This approach could be understood to address young people's risk of and resilience to dangerous alcohol consumption supported by data from the Florida Tobacco Pilot which saw a significant reduction in tobacco consumption following their social media Truth campaign highlighting the tactics of the Tobacco Industry (Kennedy et al 2012). Critical media literacy is also highlighted by other studies as influencing health related decision making (Piran 2010, Austin et al 2012).

However this approach can also be understood as mobilising young people to consider ways to address the risk posed by others, in particular social marketing by the alcohol industry to young people, and the failure of advertising industry codes of practice to prevent children's exposure to alcohol marketing (Hastings and Angus 2009).

Resisting social pressure to drink alcohol – behaviour modification or critical thinking?

Griffin & Botvin (2014) argue that adolescents may be unprepared to cope with the social, intra-personal and cultural forces which promote alcohol use. Botvin and Griffin(2007) also suggest that enabling young people to recognise and resist social pressure to consume alcohol is a key element of most positively evaluated prevention programmes, a view supported by others (e.g. Lemstra et al 2010, Vogl et al 2012) The emphasis in relation to tackling social pressure would appear to vary across programmes however. There are a number of programmes that have been piloted in the Australian context which have recounted a positive impact on young people's self-reported drinking behaviour (Champion et al 2013, Midford et al 2014).The CLIMATE Schools alcohol module, for example, contains three components - information, a normative component and resistance skills training.

This involves teaching skills to resist alcohol offers in addition to skills to recognise the contextual risks associated with when, where and with whom they choose to consume alcohol or other drugs. The aim is to teach young people to resist such pressures whilst maintaining friendships and social standing (Vogl et al 2012:412).

This approach focuses on harm minimisation encouraging young people to drink safely rather than not at all. While the CLIMATE module acknowledges the media as a potential source of social pressure, critical media literacy does not appear to be a key element of this programme. The focus is primarily on modifying the consumption behaviour of young people. While the Alcohol Truth Project does not set out to try to change young peoples' drinking behaviour it does reflect positively evaluated prevention programmes which try to help young people recognise social pressure to drink. However rather than a focus on peer pressure suggested by the Climate school alcohol module focus on resisting pressure to consume alcohol "*whilst maintaining friendships and social standing*", this programme seeks instead to raise critical awareness of the tactics of social marketing and a broader concept of alcohol harm.

Showing how alcohol is being put subliminally in our minds through social media. Now you can concentrate on what people are advertising – be aware of it (Anil)

¹ All names are pseudonyms

To help us recognise how social media is used, how easy it is to trick us – I didn't realise how sneaky it was. I am a lot more aware how they use social media and how it affects people, how they persuade (Jane)

How the advertising of alcohol misleads people, how it can affect the world – young people – how companies make so much money selling alcohol...I don't drink - I came to this with no reason not to drink – this course has given me reasons not to drink – an answer (Lewis)

The approach of raising of critical awareness of marketing is supported by Begoray et al (2014) operating programmes in the Canadian context which aim to teach adolescents to evaluate the purposes and persuasive techniques of commercial media and its influence on their health and who argue that "the out of school literacies of adolescents need to be used more frequently in school (p269)." Redmond (2015) also points out that although young people may be "digital natives" they may lack the skills necessary to 'deeply analyse and evaluate media texts, including message purpose, slant, bias, production techniques, codes and conventions, ideologies and effects.'

When you scroll down your Facebook you don't really think about the adverts you see. Some adverts are shared by your friends because they are funny but they are trying to sell you something (Carrie)

Alcohol is advertised through social media – people don't really notice it but it is there. [Since participating on the course] I have noticed how they try and target you through social media. You realise that your knowledge of alcohol is a lot and that you have been advertised to (Layla and Nina).

Redmond highlights the importance of inviting students to contribute, integrating texts from student/popular culture. Begoray et al (2014:271) support this point advocating that students produce and create visual representations as this has a critical role in enabling them to deconstruct manipulative media messages. In addition the danger of students merely becoming familiar with advertising messages, is avoided.

[By] making posters with your friends you can remember what you do (Anil)

It has not just been listening it has involved practical things every week, building up to a bigger practical task – all of our attention will go into this, focusing on the message – we are getting something out of it, producing a final product - you learn in an unusual way [Layla and Nina on producing a short film on an element of the impact of alcohol on young people]

Begoray et al (2014) also suggest, however, that critical media health literacy approaches in schools are still relatively rare. A study by Austin et al (2012) found that students needed media literacy skills to assess the credibility of health related information as this influenced self- efficacy in health related decision making. In a rapid review of evidence in relation to alcohol misuse prevention in adolescents Foxcroft (2006) found that social marketing media based intervention was one of the most effective. This is supported by the findings from the Florida Tobacco Pilot Programme which engaged in tobacco industry 'denormalization' via the Tobacco Truth media campaign (Kennedy et al 2012).

Challenging Normative Assumptions

Including accurate information about alcohol consumption is often included in prevention programmes because research has shown that adolescents tend to overestimate how much their peers drink or use drugs (Griffin and Botvin 2014). The problem here, acknowledged by Stigler et al (2011) in relation to the USA but which could equally apply to Scotland, is that alcohol use in US society is normative amongst adults and young people. Giesbrecht (2007) points out that it is young adults and other adults who provide heavy drinking role models for youth. He questions, therefore, that young people should be the primary target for preventative alcohol harm strategies.

Alcohol Truth Project course activities and fact sheets given to young people, aim to give information challenging normative misconceptions about the role and impact of marketing on social media, how and why the alcohol industry targets young people and alcohol harm. By encouraging young people to discuss fact sheets with family and friends and develop media products highlighting key messages in relation to alcohol harm and social marketing, this project broadens the target audience to adults and the wider community reinforcing an implicit message that for maximum efficacy prevention strategies cannot only target young people.

I liked the fact sheets – when you are teaching a fact to someone else you learn it yourself – I did teach my parents they were quite shocked (Anil)

The fact sheets are handy so we can take them home and show our parents, I talked to my Mum - she was surprised (Craig)

Style of Programme Delivery

A key issue in the delivery of prevention programmes in schools is the inconsistency of delivery. This is significant when it is known that traditional didactic ‘fear-appeal’ teaching approaches can not only be ineffective they may actually encourage risky drinking behaviour (Levine 2014, Botvin and Griffin 2007).

When someone says don’t do it you just want to do it (Jane)

While there is a consensus that interactive methods are the most effective style of delivery for prevention programmes in schools, there is also an acknowledgement in the literature that this may not always be the most familiar, comfortable or indeed practical method for all teachers (e.g. dependent on class size or curricular pressures). This has led to a lack of fidelity in the delivery of prevention programmes assessed in trial conditions as effective (Kumar et al 2013).

A range of initiatives in the Australian context use internet programmes for school based prevention based on social influence theory. This includes the CLIMATE programme which uses a combination of interactive computer based materials and class based activities. Internet programmes are perceived to be appealing because they are low cost, easy to implement in that they do not necessarily involve professionals and the delivery is therefore consistent (Champion et al 2013). Internet based programmes do not, however, allow space for the debate and dialogue seen as central to the development of critical thinking skills. Piran (2010) argues

..feminist informed perspectives to eating disorder prevention emphasis contextual factors in understanding behaviour and, hence utilise critical participatory dialogues to construct knowledge that can guide transformative actions (Piran 2010:188)

Levine (2014) makes a link between approaches to eating disorder prevention and drug misuse prevention. Referencing Piran and his own work, Levine (2014:184) suggests that there is good

evidence supporting Piran's claim that a critical social perspective (CSP) underpins many effective prevention programmes and similarly argues,

A CSP emerges most readily from dialogue-based education facilitated by a skilled adult, that encourages increased awareness of and critical thinking about dominant cultural values and practices...

The Alcohol Truth Project's interactive style of delivery has theoretical support, then, as the most effective means of delivering educational prevention programmes (Botvin and Griffin 2007). Pupils were treated with friendly respect, offered refreshments and encouraged via activities to debate and discuss key themes. However the success of this approach owes a great deal to not only the skills of the facilitators but also their clarity about what it is they are trying to achieve and their approach to work with young people.

A critical element for the young people in this programme was that they were not going to be judged and a key concern about teachers delivering the programme would be teacher's perceived desire to control or influence their behaviour. Materials might be delivered via a conception, as outlined earlier, of keeping young people "safe."

Teachers couldn't do it – teachers would preach to you (Lewis)

The key difference in approach then is understanding young people as active participants in producing knowledge, encouraged to share their perspectives, rather than being constructed as passive recipients or mere consumers of information.

We are not scared to share our experiences of alcohol like we would be in a PSE class (Layla and Nina)

Don't just start shoving facts, be a bit easy, try to get our opinions rather than just delivering loads of information – try to get all the class involved (Juan's advice to teachers delivering the programme)

The school guidance teacher made the point that the school is bombarded with requests and education materials which aim to intervene in young people's lives. Interventions in school which aim to tackle social issues but implicitly construct youth and their potential behaviour as the problem to be solved are likely to be received negatively by young people and as pointed out earlier may actually encourage the behaviour they aim to stop (Levine 2014, Babor et al 2010).

Addressing Alcohol Harm and Education for Citizenship

Given that the effect on reducing alcohol harm in the long term is at best tentative, Giesbrecht (2007:1348) argues that rather than trying to reduce youth consumption that school based education should focus on:

raising awareness of alcohol policy options, teaching students about the key players in policy debates and deliberations, indicating the roles that students and parents can play in influencing local alcohol policies..

These elements reflect the political literacy content that can be intrinsic to citizenship education (Keating et al 2009) and raises the question of why school based prevention programmes are usually assumed to be addressed as part of Personal Social Education and not parts of the curriculum that critically consider the political landscape; how policy is made, social issues are addressed and power

is exercised. A key element of this is critical media literacy seen by Mihailidis and Thevenin (2013: 1611) as a “core competency for engaged citizenship in a participatory democracy.”

In Scotland education for citizenship is a central element of school curricula and conceived as permeating the curriculum and the ethos of the school (LTS/Education Scotland 2002 & 2011). Young people are considered as citizens now not citizens in waiting. Education for global citizenship is regarded as “a holistic approach” which

..encourages the development of young people as independent, creative and critical thinkers, confident in themselves, secure in their own beliefs and values, committed to active participation in society, respectful of others and willing to find solutions to local and global problems (LTS/Education Scotland 2011)

A key difference between alcohol education programmes aiming to modify young people’s future or current drinking behaviour and those encouraging a critical social perspective is that the first constructs young people as primarily consumers of knowledge and makes them the primary target for change. The second recognises young people as producers of knowledge who can do meaningful things for themselves and others including joining and leading adults in working for beneficial social changes (Levine 2014, Begoray et al 2014, Piran 2010, Giesbrecht 2007).

This distinction reflects a tension often highlighted in relation to education for citizenship in the context of schools between a conception of citizenship education as aiming to influence and control young people’s behaviour and one which seeks to mobilise young people’s creative capacity to think for themselves (Johnson and Morris 2010). Evidence would seem to suggest in relation to alcohol harm that merely trying to modify individual behaviour does not work, that rather school based education needs to enable young people to critically consider the wider issues impacting on public health and their role in deciding and influencing the social policy strategies that might best contribute to the common good (Fielding 2012, Pring 1999).

Conclusion

Griffin and Botvin (2014) argue that more research is needed to facilitate wide dissemination of effective prevention programmes in schools, families and communities. Certainly this case study of a relatively small Pilot Programme cannot offer concrete evidence of a model of practice for successful long term prevention. What this paper has demonstrated, however, is that there is limited evidence of long term success in any education prevention programme setting out to influence individual young people’s consumption of alcohol. Using the example of the Alcohol Truth Project this paper has set out to argue for a reframing of alcohol misuse prevention initiatives in schools.

If, as the evidence suggests, it is the wider social, cultural and economic environment that has to change in order to reduce alcohol consumption in the population as a whole, our understanding of addressing risk needs to change from a focus on the potentially risky behaviour of individual young people, to a focus on the risks posed by their environment. The primary concern then, of this type of preventative health education, would be on raising young people’s critical awareness of dominant ideological perspectives which influence normative cultural practices. A key element of this, in the context of the increasing use of social media by both young people and alcohol industry marketers, is critical media literacy.

It is argued that this approach to alcohol misuse prevention may be more effectively placed within the context of education for citizenship, encouraging young people to critically consider the wider issue of alcohol harm on society and who or what influences such cultural practices. In the Scottish

context young people are understood as citizens now rather than citizens in waiting which suggests a role for young citizens in addressing social issues such as alcohol harm. The fact, highlighted here, that participative styles of delivery encouraging debate and dialogue are the most effective in prevention initiatives reinforces the need to listen to young people, to use their cultural experience as a resource and encourage the development and expression of a questioning perspective on social issues. While it is clear that school based education is not the answer to tackling alcohol harm, this does not mean that it does not have a role in the solution. The education of young people must be understood, however, as dialogical rather than instrumental, mobilising their capacity to think critically and creatively to find solutions for themselves and others.

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